

Sheet Mulching How-to

Be sure to contact your local water agency or city /state to check on potential rebates for lawn conversion, irrigation and/or plant selection. Do this prior to starting your project!!

- **Needs**

- Cardboard (*rolled-B flute variety or salvaged boxes*)
- Coarse mulch
- Compost

- **Prep the site**

- **Plant:** 5 gallon or larger plants before sheet mulching
- Chop down weeds if waist high or taller. If you are just getting rid of lawn or semi-obnoxious please do not remove! Just sheet mulch over it!!!
- **Trenching:** along the hardscape (*sidewalks, patios, driveways, etc*) edges to accommodate excess mulch and block running weeds (*10-12 inches wide, 3-4 inches deep*)
 - Try to angle the trench at 45 degrees toward the hardscape
 - These trenched materials can be used to create mounds in your landscape
 - Makes for great drainage for native and drought tolerant plants
 - Creates interest in an otherwise flat landscape
- **Irrigation:** convert some to drip and/or cap ones that you do not want/need to use
 - **Note:** you may have to install a riser on the ones that you are converting. The extra length will be necessary to accommodate the addition of mulch. Accessibly is another benefit.
 - Most irrigation connections are $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ inch

- **Lay down cardboard**

- Rolled cardboard can purchased directly through some distributors
- **Salvaged Cardboard Options:**
 - **Grocery stores:** (Costco, Safeway, Trader Joes).
 - **Bike Shops:** very large boxes
 - **Furniture and Appliance Stores**
 - Call ahead prior to going
 - Be patient and give yourself plenty of time. Mention to them that you are doing a sheet mulch project and they will be more likely to accept (you may have to educate them ☺)
 - Don't pass on small boxes, they have their needs
 - Skip waxed fruit boxes
 - Craigslist or Freecycle: **Safety: remember, you are going to strangers' house, so please be mindful. Go during the day, take a friend, ask for the materials to be left outside or on the curb, etc.**
- My rule of thumb for salvage cardboard:
 - Open boxes for getting rid of lawns and covering soil patches

CompostGal: Consulting, Landscaping & Education

Lori Caldwell

925-922-3504

compostgal@hotmail.com

- Leave boxes closed for getting rid of noxious weeds (Bermuda grass, ivy, vinca, oxalis)
 - Make sure to overlap by at least 6-8 inches
- **Water cardboard**
 - Helps to anchor it and starts the decomposition process
 - **BE CAREFUL:**
 - Water can make the cardboard slippery
 - Try to avoid ripping the cardboard with shovels, feet or wheelbarrows
- **Add compost:** (1-2 inches) and lay drip irrigation hoses (or label where converted heads now reside)
- **Top with 3-7 inches of coarse mulch:**
 - Make sure to allow 12" space around trees and away from your house
- **Planting after sheet mulching**
 - Plant drought-tolerant plants in the sheet mulched mounds
 - If getting rid of something noxious under the sheet mulch, wait at least nine months before you plant (*Ex: Bermuda grass*)
 - **1 gallon plants**
 - Cut an X in the cardboard and carefully peel back cardboard
 - Dig out some of the topsoil (*don't make the hole too deep*)
 - Remove plant from container and loosen the root ball if root-bound
 - Place plant in hole and fold cardboard back down. A few handfuls of compost would be great over the cardboard at this point.
 - Cover the layers with mulch. Be sure to allow room around the plant; don't put mulch right next to the major stem of the plant.
 - **4" plants (*easiest way*)**
 - Move mulch/compost back to cardboard layer
 - Remove plant from container
 - Loosen root ball, if necessary
 - Place plant right on top of cardboard. Add compost, if necessary
 - Move mulch back. Be sure to allow room around the plant; don't put mulch right next to the major stem of the plant.

Additional Notes:

While any time of year is a great time to sheet mulch, planting natives or drought tolerant plants should be left for Fall/Winter. Planting in the summer months forces you to use more water to keep them alive. Winter rains get the plants' roots get established. They may still need supplemental water during the first couple of years in the summer months, but not as much.